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Earth Shock Nixon Mentioned Is Believed Quake in Russia

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The earth shock in the Soviet Union, which Vice President Richard M. Nixon suggested Wednesday "might have been a large underground nuclear explosion," was equal to 2 million tons of TNT.

But it is believed to have been an earthquake. It happened more than 20 miles beneath the surface of the earth along a major seismic fault—subject to earthquake shocks several times a week.

Were it a man-made explosion, it would be of major size—a large atomic or small hydrogen bomb. As an earthquake it should be of only academic interest.

The quake, which occurred in the Kamchatka Peninsula of Soviet East Asia Oct. 13, was catapulted into national interest by Nixon in a speech in Toledo, Ohio.

"Only a few days ago," the Vice President said, "the new seismic station at Fort Sill, Okla., recorded a disturbance in the Soviet Union. It might have been an earthquake. Or it might have been a large underground nuclear explosion. We have no way of knowing."

Nixon was reportedly briefed on the earth shock by John A. McCone, chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, who was shown the seismographic reading at Fort Sill on Oct. 14 or 15 and made his own reference to suspicious explosions in the Soviet Union.

The fact of the briefing could not be confirmed with either Nixon, who is campaigning, or McCone, who was in New York yesterday.

But, the Kamchatka earthquake was the only major seismic disturbance in the Soviet Union during the period from Oct. 13 to Oct. 20. This is the last period for which precise information on the location of the epicenter of seismic disturbances is available.

Despite the fact that it was two full magnitudes over the 4.75 magnitude cutoff above which scientists said they could detect underground nuclear tests, scientists in the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey refused to speculate on its origin. They simply noted the extreme depth at which the disturbance took place which virtually ruled out a man-made explosion.

Nowhere could any indication be found that there was evidence that the Soviet Union had violated the 2-year-old moratorium on nuclear testing.

A seismologist at the Wichita Mountains Seismic Observatory at Fort Sill, to which Nixon referred, said the Vice President's statement was "a complete surprise at me."

The Fort Sill observatory was set up and opened last month in accord with the recommendations of scientists who participated in the Geneva conference on nuclear testing.

It is operated by a private firm for the Air Force Technical Applications Center of the Advanced Research Projects Agency.

The observatory, a Defense Department spokesman said, is only an experimental station and can not, by itself, determine the origin, no less the nature, of a seismic disturbance.

An earthquake epicenter (point of origin) is determined by compilation of a number of reports from seismic stations all over the world. The United States Coast and Geodetic Survey is the worldwide headquarters for correlation of such reports.

Besides the details from Fort Sill and the Survey, The Washington Post was also assured by the Atomic Energy Commission, ARPA, the Department of Defense, and the staff of the Joint Congress-

sional Committee on Atomic Energy that there was no evidence available to substantiate a charge that the Soviet Union might have resumed bomb testing.

The Committee staff was brought into the matter by Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.)

Gore apparently anticipated what Nixon was to say on the subject Wednesday night. He earlier alerted the staff to do research on the subject, and issued his own counter-statement almost as soon as the Vice President voiced his suspicion.

Gore also quoted APTAC and AEC sources as to the lack of evidence, and suggested that the Vice President had "gone off the deep end."

Yesterday, United Press International reported, Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) demanded in a telegram to President Eisenhower to know if the Government has any real evidence that Russia is violating its moratorium on nuclear testing.

He called for a halt to such statements if based on "mere suspicions" because they endangered efforts to get a permanent test ban agreement.